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MASKEPETOON

ALBERTA'S FIRST MARTYR TO PEACE

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FOREWORD

THE MINISTRY of the Founder of Christianity was a teaching ministry. How true this is can be seen by reading the Gospel of Matthew. It is largely composed of a series of lessons either directly didactic as in the Sermon on the Mount which is introduced—"And He opened His mouth and taught them"—or indirectly as with the rich list of parables, matchless illustrations of the art of teaching. At least seven times in this gospel alone we find some form of the verb to teach used referring to the work of Jesus or used in His instructions to His disciples. And this gospel concludes with the great commission "go ye therefore, and *teach* all nations."

The early missionaries to the Edmonton area were true to the great commission. They understood what is sometimes forgotten—that religious truth is part of the great body of truth. So by these men church and school were both promoted with equal zeal. It was a missionary, James Evans, who reduced the Cree language to writing. The syllabic system which he invented was the key not only to the Scriptures, but to any literature of instruction for the Indians of the West. And there was nothing niggardly about his great gift. With the spirit of the true scientist he made it available to all who wished to use it and it became the vehicle of common use by missionaries and teachers of all faiths.

Rundle, Woolsey and the McDougalls, George and John, the pioneer missionaries of the Protestant faith in what is now Alberta, were all pre-eminently teachers as well as preachers. How well they did their work is attested by Dr. Grant of Queen's University and Captain Palliser and Dr. Hector of the Palliser expedition.

In his book, "Ocean to Ocean," Dr. Grant describes a visit to Victoria mission now called Pakan, where the McDougalls founded school and church in 1863. He pays warm tribute to the intelligence and understanding with which the children in the Sunday School answered questions put to them by the visitors.

Captain Palliser, an army officer of engineers, and Dr. Hector, medical doctor and geologist, each paid tribute to the work of the missionaries.

In his sketch covering the life of Maskepetoon, the first martyr to the cause of peace in Alberta, Mr. Berry with rare sympathetic understanding, shows the effect of the impact of the message and personality of the missionary upon one of Nature's noblemen. The life and death of Maskepetoon are the perfect and complete answer to the question—"Is the missionary effort worth while?" The answer is yes, without qualification, providing the Great Teacher's precept and example be heeded and the evangel is a teaching ministry.

At the present time the citizens of Edmonton have on foot a community enterprise. The original church building which George McDougall erected 1871-2 is being restored. It will be used as a museum where articles of historical interest, pictures of pioneer missionaries of different faiths as well as of pioneers in education and other fields will be kept on view. The purpose is to make it a shrine dedicated to the memory of all the pathfinders in the different fields of worthy human endeavour. Private citizens, business firms, church and community organizations and artists are contributing to the cause. Several thousands of dollars will be expended and it is hoped in the near future to have an appropriate dedication ceremony.

Thus the community of Edmonton in particular and Alberta in general seeks to honour the memory of those who laid straight and strong the foundation of its life.

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Maskepetoon

Alberta's First Martyr to Peace

BY

J. P. BERRY

"I WILL never become a Christian as long as there are horses to steal and scalps to take." So declared the Cree Warrior-Chief Maskepetoon to Rev. R. T. Rundle, Wesleyan missionary, at their first meeting. The Chief had an ungovernable temper and in a fit of anger had scalped one of his own wives. She recovered from the shock, but ever afterwards had a shiny skull. Yet this savage of the West became worthy of a high place in Canada.

The first record we have of Maskepetoon or "Broken Arm" is in the writings of Maximillian who met him in the Central Plains of the United States in 1833. He was then wearing, suspended from his neck, an effigy of President Andrew Jackson, whom he had visited in Washington the year before. While it is not possible to give any connected or detailed sketch of his life, there are some very interesting and revealing incidents mentioned by various writers, especially by Dr. John McDougall, whose books give a very intimate picture of the Red Men of Alberta in the sixties and seventies of the last century. A few dates are quite certain.

The old Stoney Chief, Chiniquay, who was a boy in the Cree camp at the time of Rundle's first visit in 1841, told Dr. John McLean that in spite of Maskepetoon's avowal that he would never become a Christian, there was from that time a marked change noticeable in his actions. He was a staunch friend of Rundle's from their first meeting and in the fall of that same year, at Fort Edmonton he became acquainted with Rev. James Evans, the inventor of the Cree Syllabic, and was strongly impressed by his personality.

Paul Kane in his book "Wanderings of an Artist" mentions an interview that he had with Maskepetoon in the spring of 1848 in which the Chief told of his confusion in regard to Christianity because of the conflicting ideas presented by the missionaries—Hunter, Anglican; Thibault, Roman Catholic; Rundle, Wesleyan. He stated that he would wait until they had agreed among themselves before he would accept the new religion. But the leaven of the new life had permeated his being more than he knew. Chief Factor Harriot of the Hudson's Bay Company, a strong supporter of Rundle and his work, took a deep interest in the Chief and taught him to read in the Cree Syllabic the portions of Scripture and the hymns which he and Rundle had translated.

Maskepetoon's renown as a warrior led the Blackfeet to give him the name "Mon-e-guh-ba-now" (the young Chief) but it caused his father to warn him against the danger of the course he was following.

"My son, you are making a great mistake. The glory you are seeking will be short-lived. Delighting yourself in war is all wrong. If you want to be a really great man work for peace."

Six different times did the father speak in this strain to his son, but on each occasion the warrior remained silent and sullen, yet was unable to forget the father's advice.

At length he went to the lodge of an aged member of the tribe and asked, "What is best in life?" He was told, "Your father is better able to tell you than I am. Ask him." However, when the young Chief persisted, the old philosopher took eight small sticks and divided them into two groups of four each. Those in his left hand he gave the names, falsehood, dishonesty, hatred and war. Those in his right hand he called truth, honesty, love and peace.

Then in the true eloquence of the red man he described the nature of each of the vices leading to war and followed with the glories of the virtues that give peace. Dramatically holding up his left hand, he asked, "What shall I do with these? Shall I keep them or burn them?"

"Burn them," was the response of the warrior.

"And what shall I do with these that make for peace? Shall I bind them and give them to you as a remembrance of what I have said?"

"Bind them well," he cried, "and give them to me."

From that day Maskepetoon was a maker of peace, for he had gained a vision of the best things in life. He made peace because his love was strong enough to conquer hate and change his enemies into friends. While the name of Rundle is not mentioned in this story we can be pretty certain that his life and work are shining through it all, for this tribe was ever most friendly to him.

Rev. Geo. McDougall in his first visit to the Plains in 1862 tells of meeting Maskepetoon in a large Cree Camp. He found him reading the 8th chapter of Romans in the Cree New Testament, given to him by Missionary Woolsey, a brother-in-law of Rundle's and his successor. In the camp was a small band of Christians surrounded by many evidences of savagery—the drum of the conjurers, the gambler's "He-he-yar" and the winner's exultant whoops. After the first meal the Chief called two men and told them to gather all who could be spared to listen to the praying man who had come from afar. The criers went forth and summoned men and women, who came in great numbers to the Centre. All were reverent and respectful, for all had some sense of religion. Peter Erasmus, Prince of Interpreters, who had been engaged by the Hudson's Bay Company to assist Woolsey, threw himself heart and soul into the thought and purpose of the speaker.

When the missionary had finished his address, Maskepetoon arose and with quiet dignity spoke to the crowd. "My people, I told you that my friend from the East would speak to you words of wisdom and truth. I want you to think of what you have heard."

Next year when the McDougalls moved from Norway House to what is now Pakan, they found a warm friend and helper in this native nobleman. He welcomed father and son to the Cree Council and encouraged them to express their views on all questions which came up for discussion. He stood as a champion of the white man and his civilization. The Chief was given a room for his own use in the parsonage and often retired to it for reading and meditation.

The Blackfeet, the war eagles of the plains, were often exceedingly troublesome to the Crees. On one occasion, as a result of these raids, destitution had fallen on several of the camps. Many Crees had eaten their dogs and were forced to resort to killing their horses. Under such conditions the winter's work of gathering provisions and making robes had been seriously hampered. Maskepetoon knew that their enemies were encamped in great force to the south, but he determined to risk all in an attempt for peace and with a small following started for their camp. While en route a war party of the Blackfeet came sweeping down upon them with such force that the Chief's few followers fled in dismay, leaving him with his grandson, a lad of about fifteen years. Maskepetoon stood still and erect and taking his New Testament from his pocket began to read in a clear and quiet voice. The Blackfeet seeing the chance of taking the two alive, refrained from shooting and came on apace, although much puzzled by the behaviour of the man as he made no effort to flee or to defend himself. Besides, he was holding something in his hand—what could it be?

At length one of them recognized the Chief and cried, "It is Mon-e-guh-ba-now" and they all rushed forward in great joy exclaiming, "Our hearts are glad to make peace with you. What is that in your hand?" And the reply came, "It is the word of the Great Spirit." "That explains it," cried the leader. "It is his will that we meet as brothers today." Before they parted it was arranged, on Maskepetoon's guarantee of safety, that a Blackfeet embassy should come to the Cree camp. A truce was formally arranged amid great rejoicing.

John McDougall relates that one day Maskepetoon was riding with him in his wagon when they met an old Indian who stopped to shake hands with John. The Chief had been very ready to shake with all they had met, but now he turned his face the other way. John nudged him saying, "I his man wants to shake hands with you." Then the Chief, as if jerking himself from under a great strain, turned and gave his hand to the old fellow. It was some time before he spoke. "John, that man killed my son and I have often longed to kill him but because I have wanted to become a Christian I have kept, with great effort, from avenging my son's murder. Meeting your father and sitting beside you has softened my heart and now I have given him my hand. It was a hard thing to do but it is done and he need fear no longer, as far as I am concerned." He had such an exalted conception of a Christian that it is doubtful if he ever formally "professed" to be one, being restrained by humility.

On another occasion the Crees were encamped near the site of the present city of Wetaskiwin, when a party of Blackfeet off the trail to Fort Edmonton to trade, asked for a truce. When this was granted the Blackfeet came to the tent of the Chief to smoke the pipe of peace. One of their number was the murderer of Maskepetoon's father some years before. When the fact became known, consternation reigned on both sides for none knew just what the Chief might do under such provocation. But they had not long to wait. He ordered that his best horse should be saddled and brought to the tent door and then that the culprit should come before him. The murderer came as to his death but was told to be seated. The Chief handed to him his best suit, richly decorated. The man took this as but preliminary to his execution and all held their breath. Maskepetoon spoke, "You killed my father. The time was, when I would have gloried in drinking your blood, but that time is past. You need not fear. You must now become a father to me, wear my clothes, ride my horse. Tell your people that this is the way Maskepetoon takes revenge."

"You have killed me, my son!" cried the old murderer. "Never in the history of my people has such a thing as this been known. My people and all men will say! 'The young Chief is brave and strong and good. He stands alone.'"

This event gave rise to the name Wetaskiwin—Hills of Peace. A cairn has been erected by the Historic Sites Committee on the site to commemorate this treaty of peace between the Crees and Blackfeet.

In the spring of 1869, the year that later saw Riel's first rebellion at Fort Garry, there was much discontent and a sullen resentment against the Whites over much of the plains. This was at the time when the control of the vast Canadian West was passing from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion Government and little attempt was being made by the new officials to enforce law and order, for these men had none of the long training of the Bay's officials and what efforts they made often produced the opposite results from what they planned. The rum-runners were creating in some places a veritable pandemonium. This gave Riel and his gang of agitators a chance to rouse

the fears of the French Half-breeds and natives that all their rights and privileges were about to be swept away.

The McDougalls were well aware of the smouldering fires and planned to meet the situation by a great summer camp of all the tribes that could be induced to attend, for a concerted buffalo hunt, but chiefly to meet the missionaries, school teachers and Hudson's Bay officials with whom they might freely discuss their grievances and learn the plans of the Government for them. Maskepetoon entered heartily into the plans and decided that he would seek the co-operation of the Blackfeet. So with his sons he went to their camp, bearing a white flag and an open Bible. They were received in a friendly manner, but within a few hours, all were treacherously murdered. For the moment the situation was most critical and dangerous, for there was a bitter cry for revenge, but soon a reaction set in as the nobility of Maskepetoon's sacrifice was seen to more than match the dastardly deed of the Blackfeet.

Instead of war and its horrors peace reigned around Edmonton in the days of the Red River Rebellion.

THE CHURCH BY THE RIVER

No costly pile of marbled beauty thou;
No rich magnificence of sculptured art;
No windows, colourful in cloistered light;
No halls, with gorgeous trappings set apart.
No doors of ancient metals, fashioned fair;
No massive dome, no deep and misty aisles;
No archways, sweeping up toward the skies;
No mighty organ that the soul beguiles.

No, just a simple church, beyond the Fort,
A humble building, yet a holy place.
Standing with simple lines, above the hill;
Its portals free to every tribe and race.
There, with the quiet river at its feet--
Romantic highway of those early days--
There, with their simple tools, their sweat, their tears,
They hewed and sawed, and built, and gave God praise.
No templed masonry, no work of guild;
No poem that the centuries might build.
A simple Structure, yet sublimely grand,
Built by a workman's heart, and willing hand.

And here, where now a modern city rears,
Its mighty sky-line for a world to see.
Still stands, with logs they hauled--those gallant souls--
And whip-sawn lumber, stands for you and me,
This dwelling place of God, this precious shrine.
McDougall's church. What memories are thine!

J. T. STEPHENS

All Peoples' Mission, 1945.